Original Article

School Management Committee monitoring principles and performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in Bugisu Muslim District Council, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Globally, monitoring and evaluation have taken centre stage in the development process. This is due to the fact that without measuring progress and performance, organisations may not know whether they are achieving. It has been observed over the years that Muslim-founded educational institutions have suffered performance issues the world over. In Uganda, it has been noted that Muslim-founded primary schools attempt to involve School Management Committees during monitoring activities. However, the report of BMDC (2018) indicates that the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools was wanting. This study premised on Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) constructs of monitoring, aimed at investigating the contribution of monitoring principles adhered to by the SMCs on the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in Uganda, taking the case of BMDC. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study, with quantitative and qualitative data approaches, while linear regression was used to obtain the magnitude of the contribution of monitoring principles to the performance of primary schools under BMDC. The study found out that the monitoring principles adhered to by the SMC were wanting and, therefore, may have affected the performance of the schools. The study concluded that monitoring principles strongly contributed positively to the performance of the Muslim-founded Primary Schools. It is as such recommended that BMDC needs to establish an M&E framework which would ably inform monitoring principles for the SMCs.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, monitoring and evaluation have taken centre stage in the development process. This is due to the fact that without measuring progress and performance, organisations may not know whether they are achieving. It has been observed over the years that Muslim-founded educational institutions have suffered performance issues the world over. Muslim educational institutions have faced a lot of hiccups in performance. Kabonga (2018) contends that principles of monitoring include: learning and accountability, quality assurance, participatory monitoring and evaluation, reporting, and mentoring. In order for an entity to ensure that performance is achieved, such monitoring principles need to be illustrated during follow-up on the progress of interventions and achievement of objectives. Musharraf and Nabeel (2015) assert the mode of providing education to Muslim children varies from country to country and is influenced by both internal and external factors, including educational policies and systems, legislation, political factors, and state-religion separation, among others.

According to Musisi (2018), due to the small numbers, Muslim-founded schools face a lot of performance challenges worldwide. However, there is also general marginalisation of Muslim-founded schools when compared to those of other religious denominations in different countries (Musisi, 2018). In Uganda, this has not been any different since it has also been observed over the years that Muslims found difficulty in having their children access education. Musisi (2018) further observes that Muslims had resorted to *Madarasa* or *Qu'ran* schools to ensure that their children attain some level of education. There are different structures on the tools, methods, and mechanisms of reporting for the Muslim-founded schools in Uganda (UMSC Education Policy, 2014) as amended in (2019. However, these are not cascaded at Bugisu Muslim District Council (BMDC) schools, thus, hindering frequent updates on performance in a number of parameters. Furthermore, the UMSC Education Policy (2019) does not clearly articulate the monitoring function including the functions and roles of different organs and stakeholders. This poses a challenge that the monitoring principles including learning and accountability, quality assurance, participatory monitoring and evaluation, reporting and mentoring, may not be well pursued. This prompted undertaking this study to examine the contribution of monitoring principles to the performance of Muslim-founded Government Aided Primary Schools in Uganda.

Statement of the Problem

The Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) established structures at different levels of administration to also participate in the monitoring of Muslim-founded schools around them so as to enhance their performance (UMSC Companies Act, 1972). The UMSC Education Policy (2014) as amended in (2019), guides its different structures on the tools, methods and mechanisms of reporting. However, these are not cascaded at BMDC schools, which may hinder frequent updates on performance in a number of parameters. Furthermore, the monitoring function is not well stipulated in the UMSC Education Policy (2019) but rather talked about in the functions and roles of different organs of UMSC (2019) and stakeholders. This therefore may hinder the schools from following the monitoring principles including learning and accountability, quality assurance, participatory monitoring and evaluation, reporting, and mentoring.

The Education Act (2008) spells out a list of Terms of reference (TORs) which should be followed by foundation body representatives to School Management Committees (SMCs) and Board of Directors (BODs) during monitoring of school activities from time to time. However, the terms of reference do not stipulate the tools, methods, and mechanism of reporting, yet it is spelt out in the UMSC Education Policy (2019). These loopholes could explain the continued reported poor performance in the Muslim-founded Schools as reported by Sserugo (2010), who notes in a survey of Muslim schools that was conducted between January and April (2010) in Central, Eastern and Northern regions of Uganda, that there were recurring cases of poor students' performance, unqualified staff, dilapidated structures, and poor management of schools. This was re-echoed in the BMDC Performance Report (2018), which showed that the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools was wanting in terms of quality where the level of teacher's qualification was reported to be low, dilapidated structures, i.e., classrooms, staff rooms, and toilets, among other teaching and learning facilities.

In terms of target achievement, the selected schools were still facing challenges in registering good academic grades, being model schools and having adequate infrastructure. And lastly, in terms of timeliness, there were reported the late submission of school reports to the authorities, hiccups in the implementation of school work plans, teaching timetable, setting, and marking exams, as well as response to school requirements (Siraji, 2019). Also, the BMDC Performance Report (2018) did not bring out a clear monitoring plan and did not report what was achieved as a result of monitoring by the foundation body and did not indicate a follow-up plan on the monitoring roles of the foundation body representatives. However, the poor performance may probably be caused by foundation members not adhering to the monitoring principles. If no emphasis is put on adherence to monitoring principles by the BMDC, the SMCs of Muslim-founded Government Aided Primary Schools may continue to miss out on key issues during monitoring. This may lead to escalation of these schools' performance issues, which lead to public mistrust, misconception, accountability concerns, and low enrolment of pupils in these Government Aided Muslim-founded Schools. It further may present a very big setback in the Muslim community despite the campaign to increase the number of Muslims attaining education. This, therefore, propelled the researchers to assess the contribution of SMC monitoring principles to the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in Bugisu Muslim District Council in Mbale City.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study was premised on Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) constructs that show the power of measuring results, thus; (i) if you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure; (ii) if you can't see success, you can't reward it;(iii) if you can't reward success, you are probably rewarding failure; (iv) if you can't see success, you can't learn from it; (v) if you can't recognise failure, you can't correct it and finally; (vi) if you demonstrate results you can win public support. The above constructs help us to understand the fact that without measuring results, one can never tell whether they are achieving results (performance) or not. According to Micheli & Mari (2013), the theory and practice of performance measurement are critical because it enhances communication.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study. It further involved triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection, where shortcomings of one approach were covered by the other. The study was conducted over a period of 20 months, and it focused on monitoring and performance of the Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in Bugisu Muslim District Council in Mbale City. Specifically, the study concentrated in Mbale City because it had the biggest number of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools and there was a high level of homogeneity between schools in Mbale City and those in other BMDC Districts, thereby making findings in Mbale City generalisable to other BMDC Districts.

The study population consisted of head teachers, class teachers, and the chairpersons of the School Management Committees. The study randomly selected 20 schools out of 29 Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools to increase the generalizability of the results and to minimise biasness. The total sample size for the study was 190, out of which 178 were selected for quantitative data collection (158 were class teachers and 20 were head teachers), while a sample of 12 respondents was selected for Qualitative data collection, and these included the Chairpersons of the School Management Committees who were selected from the sampled schools because of the knowledge and expertise they have in the area of study.

Validity of the findings was ensured through expert judgement, where the Content Validity Index for the tools was found to be over the minimum recommended of 0.7 (Amin, 2005). On the other hand, consistency of findings was ensured through pilot testing of the instruments, where Cronbach Alpha was also found to be over 0.7, as recommended by Amin (2005).

The researchers used self-administered questionnaires as a research tool to collect quantitative data. The respondents subjected to this instrument included the 158 class teachers and the 20 head teachers. This instrument was aimed at collecting and capturing enough information (Fisher 2004) and because the categories of respondents were quite many. The questionnaires had three sections: Section A had the respondents' demographic information; sections B and C had close-ended questions which were in line with the objectives of the study. A 5-point Likert scale of measurement was adopted for close-ended questions. Document review and an interview guide were used to collect qualitative data that could supplement findings from quantitative data collection.

The researchers used a document review instrument to review existing secondary data, which was obtained through reading monitoring field reports submitted to BMDC by the SMC members, school reports and the BMDC education policy. Data collected from the documents was aimed at giving preliminary information about the area of study. Document review also aimed at helping the researchers to check for the parameters used by the SMC to monitor the school activities. The interview guide contained a set of questions on issues under study and was put to respondents on a face-to-face basis (Saunders et al., 2007). The interview contained open-ended questions and was subjected to the Chairpersons of the SMCs because the area of study directly focused on their area of operation, and there was a lot of information that needed to be extracted from them on a face-to-face basis, and such information could not be easily captured using a questionnaire. This category was referred to in this study as key informants.

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the distribution of data in terms of frequency of the items, the mean score to describe the average score and standard deviation to describe how distant the scores were. This package also helped the researchers to test the relationship between the variables using regression analysis and correlation tests. The researchers were also able to test the contribution of monitoring principles of SMCs on school performance using linear regression. Qualitative data was done through a thematic analysis where the content of data was transcribed, coded, and organised to identify key themes in regard to the research area. Data management was done after data was collected from the field, graphical plots and uni-variable tabulations were

used to check for outliers and missing-ness and the data was found fit for analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings present the contribution of the SMC monitoring principles to the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in BMDC. Figure 1 shows the summary of responses on how the monitoring principles are exercised by the SMC in the management of their schools.

Figure 1: Responses on SMC monitoring principles
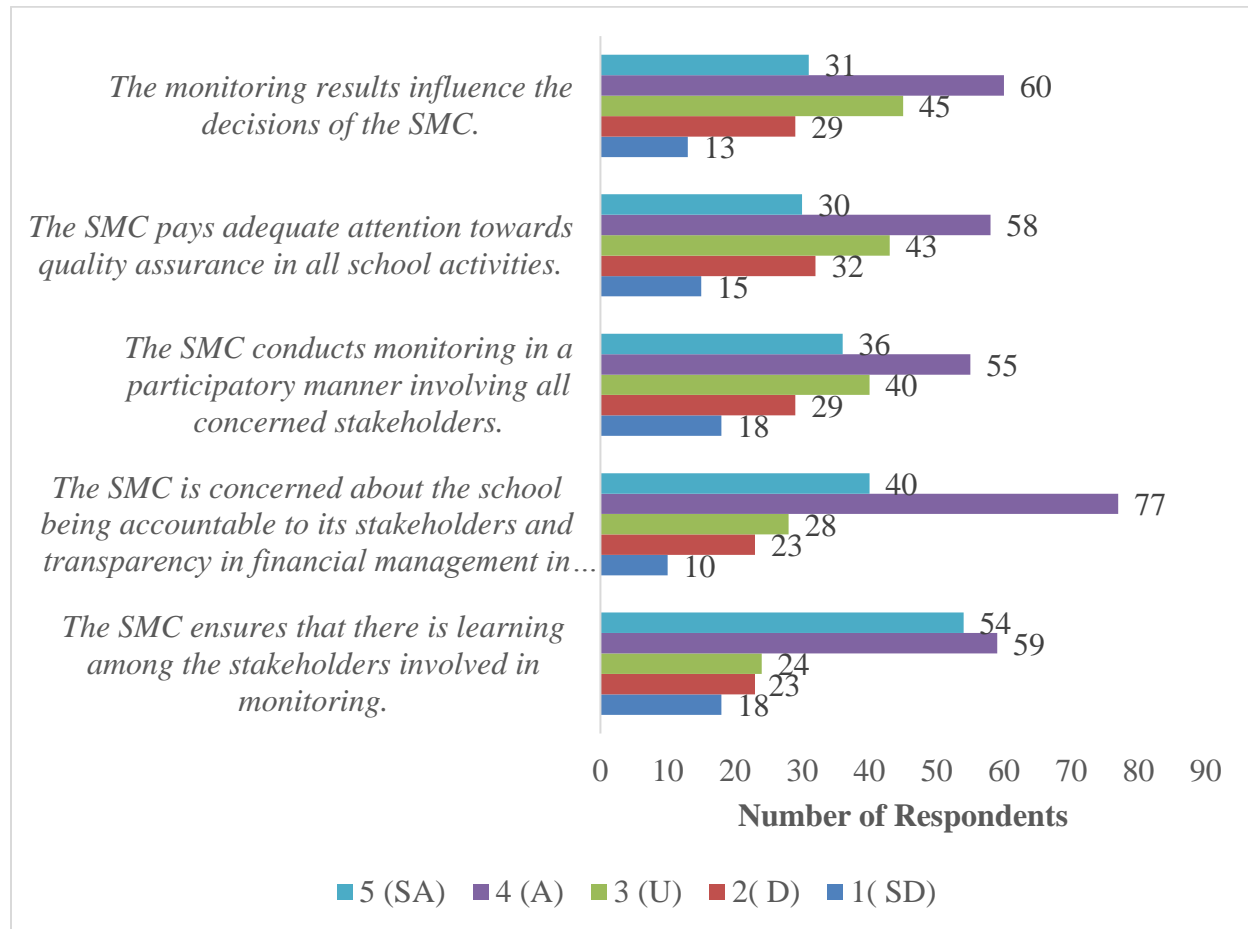
In assessing the contribution of the monitoring principles adhered to by the School Management Committees on the performance of Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in BMDC, the majority of the participants were in support of all the five constructs of monitoring principles. The numbers of those who agreed and strongly agreed were consistently ahead of their counterparts in all the five constructs, as seen in *Figure 1*. That means that SMCs do not only ensure that there was learning among the stakeholders involved in monitoring (A = 59 (33.1%), SA = 54 (30.3%) but are also concerned about the school being accountable to its stakeholders and transparent in financial management in the school in terms of income and expenditure (A = 77(43.3%), SA =40 (22.5%)). Further to this, the SMCs conduct monitoring in a participatory manner involving all concerned stakeholders (A = 55(30.9%), SA = 36 (20.2%), paid adequate attention towards quality assurance in all school activities (A = 58 (32.6), SA = 30 (16.9%) and lastly, the monitoring results influenced the decisions of the SMC (A = 60 (33.7%), SA = 31 (17.4%).

Further analysis shows clear support of the participants that the SMC ensured that there was transparency in financial management in the schools, in terms of income and expenditure (mean = 3.61, SD = 1.31) and that the SMCs were concerned with the schools being accountable to their stakeholders (mean = 3.64, SD = 1.13). However, at this level of analysis, it was noted that the participants remained neutral in the rest of the constructs. The above findings are in line with the findings from the qualitative study where key informants noted the following;

> "The school management committee is always involved in the allocation of resources by approving *the school budget. This helps us to know how the school is going to spend the funds they receive. The only challenge is that sometimes the head teachers delay to call us for the budget meetings and end up just implementing the budget without our approval"* (Kr2).

> "We all participate in meetings; the chairman always signs on the cheques when the head teacher is going to withdraw funds for school activities. That helps us know how the school uses the money and it promotes transparency although we do not follow up on the accountability of the different activities" (Kr5).

> "Sometimes when we make decisions in the SMC meetings, the head teacher implements some and other decisions are just left on paper and yet the decisions we make are important" (Kr3).

> "We have always tried to ask the headteacher to lobby for better classrooms from the government, but nothing is done. We also try to emphasise the good performance of our learners by bringing on board private teachers to help our learners, I do not know why our learners perform poorly" (Kr1).

> "Personally...when I go to the school, I interact with the head teacher, teachers, and learners. Sometimes even parents because I stay within and when I get their views, I advise accordingly" (Kr1).

Empirical Studies

The literature below resonates with the responses in the previous section. According to Reynolds et al. (2013), rushing to intervene without adequate monitoring and evaluation will continue to result in a weak evidence base for decision-making and resource allocation. The UN Women Pacific annual report (2017) asserts that any data collection process must consider the principles and ethics in monitoring because monitoring principles help to minimise the risks and promotes quality.

Uitto (2004) emphasises that it is important to share the lessons learned from monitoring with the management in order to archive the desired performance. He further asserts that sharing lessons learned helps to empower the implementing team and this can be done through participatory monitoring and evaluation. He continues to assert that documentation of lessons learnt is also necessary because it helps an organisation to develop a monitoring database which can be used as baseline data in prospective projects so as to improve their performance. Similarly, Mayanja (2020) alludes that participatory Monitoring and Evaluation promote empowerment & governance, which leads to efficiency and sustainability of interventions in the long run.

Kabonga (2018) discussed the principles and practice of monitoring and evaluation as key factors for effective development. His study brings out the following aspects in line with monitoring principles. He notes that monitoring and evaluation officials are assigned with the duties of ensuring learning and accountability. He further notes that learning helps organisations to understand why things are not happening the way they are expected to happen. It is also emphasised in this research that learning creates a platform for interrogating how the implementation of activities was done and whether they were workable. Finally, he asserts in his study that the project's success is based on learning and corrective measures.

On the other hand, the world Bank (2011) alludes in their monitoring and evaluation capacity development tool kit that participation provides a platform where stakeholders get involved in taking decisions which cultivates ownership of monitoring

and evaluation of results and hence come up with appropriate corrective measures. This, therefore, means that if all key stakeholders are involved in monitoring activities, their capacity is built and they tend to understand the underlying factors of the project's success and failures, hence making informed decisions.

Kabonga (2018) discussed the issue of the participatory monitoring principle in the following ways; He states that most development practitioners ignore the principle of participatory monitoring hence creating a gap between the stakeholders and the interventions. He continues to state that if ideas that are derived from stakeholders get enough support and are promoted, achieving development becomes easy. He, however, notes that stakeholders must be involved right from the beginning of the project in order to achieve that. Furthermore, Kabonga notes on the issue of quality assuarance that it does include not only data quality but also adherence to monitoring practices which form the standard operating procedures and quality guidelines.

Lastly, Kabonga (2018) concludes in his study that in order to achieve development, all the monitoring principles must be adhered to, which should be facilitated by committed and capacitated monitoring and evaluation officers. However, he also notes that while adherence to monitoring principles may lead to development, achieving effective development requires a backup from the monitoring skills and practices.

Nasambu (2016) asserts that it is important to have a reporting mechanism that facilitates reporting data from monitoring, either good or bad. She further asserts that failure to report and disseminate monitoring findings indicates that the desired results were not achieved, hence bringing issues of trustworthiness. Additionally, Umhlaba Development Services (2017) note that it is crucial for monitoring findings to be communicated to different stakeholders as a way of giving them feedback concerning the pre-results. Simillarly, Fenge & Gibson (2018) agree with the fact that activities that involve dissemination plans lead to community engagement which contributes to achieving impact in terms of community benefits.

OECD (2001) emphasises that monitoring aims at tracking results and hence dissemination of those results is paramount because it shows what has been done, how it has been done and whether resources were utilised as expected. It is also emphasised that dissemination of information can be done in many ways, including activity reports which inform the higher-level reports that are submitted to different stakeholders. It also notes that dissemination should include documentation of success stories and the impact of the findings on the community.

CONCLUSIONS

Monitoring principles significantly contributed to the performance of the Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary Schools in BMDC. It should be noted that the SMC are assigned the responsibility of monitoring all school activities, including academic matters. However, most of the members of some SMCs do not have the capacity to measure quality teaching and learning because they do not know the parameters to measure. This too has created a very big gap between what is monitored and what is expected to be monitored because monitoring is guided by indicators.

Further still, not all foundation body representatives on the SMC participate in the monitoring of school activities. This role is mostly done by the chairpersons who also do not frequently visit the schools, which leaves out a number of factors not monitored. Similarly, when it comes to monitoring day-to-day school activities like a continuous assessment of learners, adherence to the teaching timetable and timely completion of the curriculum, the foundation body representatives on the SMCs are unable to do that frequently because they do not have facilitation for monitoring. This undermines the quality of their discussions in the meetings because monitoring is a continuous collection of data that is used for decision-making and corrective measures. This implies that, for the foundation body representatives on the SMC to come up with informed decisions on critical matters, they must have gathered data about the same on a regular basis which was also missing. As a result, a number of issues happen in the schools and the foundation body representatives on the SMC get overwhelmed, not knowing what to do because they do not have

adequate data to inform their decisions and they are not trained on how to monitor the activities.

It was also noted during the document review that BMDC does not equip the foundation body representatives with information that facilitates their monitoring like the type of monitoring they should conduct, how often monitoring should be done, the type of data they should collect and how such data should be managed, what to monitor and how to monitor remains a question to be answered.

The issues of managing data and keeping records of the monitoring reports as evidence that show that monitoring was done were also lacking, which makes it difficult for one to assess performance. Similarly, the failure to develop indicators makes the monitoring work very hard because there is nothing to base on to measure results. Important to note is that despite the fact that some of the foundation body representatives monitor, the purpose of their monitoring is not clearly spelt out. That is to say, is the monitoring conducted at that time aimed at informing decisions, tracking progress, or following up on recommendations? This should be clearly spelt out to enable better measurement of results.

Recommendations

In a bid to improve the performance of the Government Aided Muslim-founded Primary schools in BMDC, the following recommendations should be adopted by the following stakeholder;

Bugisu Muslim District Council should;

- Conduct orientation for new appointees and also organise annual capacity-building workshops/training to enhance the monitoring knowledge and skills of the foundation body representatives on SMCs. This can also create a platform for sharing achievements, challenges, and prospects for the subsequent year.

- Share the terms of reference with the foundation body representatives on the SMCs, and design monitoring tools, indicators, and mechanisms of reporting that the foundation body representatives can use while monitoring.

- Incorporate a specific non-financial empowerment capacity-building component into school activities tailored to train the members of the SMC in aspects of monitoring and evaluation, adult literacy, and financial literacy for improved skills, knowledge, and leadership.

- Design the monitoring system to address all the monitoring components to be able to broaden the scope of change for all stakeholders in the Muslim community to actively participate in monitoring schools in a bid to achieve the desired performance.

- Design an M&E framework that should be integrated into the reporting system of the school administration to be able to track progress and also identify key target issues to be addressed collectively.

Islamic University in Uganda should;

- Organise and conduct nonpaid training workshops for the orientation of foundation body representatives on the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) and the expectations of the public from the SMC members,

- Provide inspirational lectures to the foundation body on the relevance of monitoring and the need to select people that would add value to the school administration and the school at large.

- Organising short courses on resource mobilisation skills for both the foundation body and its representatives on SMCs so as to support the schools' meagre resources.

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